

by John Fritze

With congressional Democrats and President Barack Obama emphasizing American manufacturing as key to the nation's economic recovery, two Maryland lawmakers met with Baltimore business leaders Tuesday to discuss what role Washington should take to help the industry.

During a wide-ranging talk at the Baltimore Museum of Industry, Democratic Reps. Steny Hoyer and John Sarbanes addressed trade agreements with Korea, Columbia and Panama that are pending in Congress as well as government regulations and taxes that business leaders told the lawmakers are stifling growth.

"Too many Americans are not confident that America is going to make it in the decade and century ahead," said Hoyer, the Southern Maryland lawmaker who is the second-highest ranking Democrat in the House and who has been pushing a manufacturing agenda for months. "We have a decision to make: Are we going to compete?"

Hoyer echoed bipartisan calls for Congress to get the nation's spending under control and lower corporate tax rates by weeding out loopholes.

Sarbanes, who represents portions of Baltimore city as well as parts of Anne Arundel, Howard and Baltimore counties, focused on building up the nation's infrastructure as a way to spur future economic development.

"People understand that we need to invest in our country," said Sarbanes, who has also visited Under Armour and Columbia-based TEDCO this week. "If you believe we've got to rebuild the country then, while we're at it, why don't we use American products to rebuild it?"

The Inner Harbor event drew former congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley, a Republican, and Baltimore mayoral candidate Joseph T. "Jody" Landers, a Democrat.

The focus on manufacturing in Maryland came a day after Obama travelled to an Alcoa plant in eastern Iowa to discuss the economy.

Earlier Wednesday, Hoyer toured Adcor Industries, an East Baltimore company that develops telecommunications and weapons systems for government and commercial contractors. The 100-employee Adcor has been working on a replacement for the military's M4 rifle, which Hoyer got a chance to test in the company's firing range.